Angolan Hiring Hit By Wilson

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Washington Post Foreign Service.

LONDON, Feb. 10 — Prime Minister Harold Wilson sharply attacked today the recruitment of British mercenaries for the fighting in Angola as an underworld operation by "small-time crooks."

He called for an investigation into the recruiting activities as returning mercenaries told reporters that they believe that the money for the operation came from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Detectives of Scotland Yard's Special Branch detained 44 crewcut mercenaries as they arrived at London's Heathrow Airport from Angola. They were questioned about reports that 14 mercenaries had been executed under orders from a mercenary leader named "Callan," identified as Costas Georgiou, a Greek Cypriot who until recently has been living in London.

Cord Meyer, the CIA station chief in London, would not accept telephone calls from reporters seeking a comment on the alleged CIA funding of the mercenary operation. A spokesman for the CIA in Langley, Va., called reports of CIA funding "essentially false."

Associated Press

Mercenaries, most with British passports, pass through the Brussels airport on their way back from the war in Angola.

Addressing the House of Commons on the reports of an execution of British mercenaries, Wilson said, "There can now be little doubt that an atrocity of the kind reported over the weekend did take place."

He denounced the organizers of the mercenary force here as "a small group of small-time crooks — with records." They were equipped, he said, with "vast sums of money, beyond the wildest sums they could ever earn in other ways, honest or dishonest."

Wilson indicated that he was particularly enraged that the mercenary recruiters had access to the names of discharged British soldiers, including experts from the army's killer squad, the Special Air Service. The ability to raise "a vast private army," the prime minister said, "could be a threat to democracy in this country itself."

He then asked Lord Diplock to head an inquiry into the affair to see if British law against enlisting hired soldiers needs tightening.

If the Diplock inquiry really gets to the bottom of mercenary recruitment here, it could embarrass both Wilson and the United States. If this has been a CIA operation, it would have been conducted only with the assent and cooperation of the Secret Intelligence Service, its British opposite number. That is the ground rule scrupulously observed here. It could explain the easy access that the mercenary recruiters had to the list of demobilized ex-servicemen.

There is little doubt many of the mercenary organizers have criminal records. One organizer, Norman M. Hall, a 24-year-old former paratrooper, served two years and received a dishonorable discharge for selling nine weapons in Northern Ireland to the Ulster Volunteer Force, a Protestant terrorist group.

Georgiou was an army private in Ulster in 1972 when he and another soldier held up a post office outside Belfast and stole $184. Georgiou was sentenced to five years but has been on parole.